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4701 WILLARD AVENUE, CHEVY CHASE, MARYLAND 20815 (301) 656-4068

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FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

PROGRAM The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour

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SUBJECT Armenian Terrorists

ROBERT MACNEIL: For our first focus segment tonight, we look at the threat by Armenian terrorists to set off bombs in the Toronto subway system. The threat was made last week by an organization known as the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Our Homeland. It demanded the release of three Armenians arrested on March 12th when they took over the Turkish Embassy in Ottawa, shooting a guard in the process. The embassy siege ended peacefully when the gunmen surrendered.

In the last few years, Armenian terrorism has become a major threat to peace in Western countries, most of it directed at Turkish diplomats. The anger that fuels it stems from events that began in 1915. Czarist Russia invaded the Turkish Empire, a World War I ally of Germany. Much of the fighting took place in Turkey's Eastern provinces, the center of Armenian civilization.

Worried about subversion, the Turks ordered the deportation of all Armenians and organized forced marches to Syria. It's estimated that half the Armenian population, anywhere from 600,000 to 1 1/2 million Armenians, were killed.

Armenia, which had only briefly existed as an independent nation in the 20th Century, was engulfed by the Soviet Union and Turkey, and Armenian survivors were scattered.

Now, 70 years later, many Armenians claim they were victims of the century's first genocide, a charge Turkey denies. The charge and the denial has in the past decade sparked a wave of Armenian terrorism against Turkish targets in the United States, Europe, and now Canada.

We begin tonight with an expert on the Armenian

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terrorist movement. He is Peter Schanaker (?), a criminal lawyer who's worked with police forces throughout Canada on anti-terrorist techniques and advised Toronto police on the Armenian bomb threat there. He joins us tonight from Toronto.

Mr. Schanaker, in view of what happened today, do you think this was a hoax?

PETER SCHANAKER: Oh, no. It's no hoax. Any threat made by this Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Our Homeland, or the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia, as they've been known in the past, is no joke. We take it very seriously, and so do the police forces up here.

As you know, this terrorist organization is probably the most dangerous terrorist organization in the world. In 87 percent of the cases where they perpetrate and act of terror, people die. When you contrast that with all other terrorist organizations in the world, where there's only a 14 percent chance of death, we realize how dangerous these people are.

We have no doubt that the threat that was made was made by ASALA, and as such has to be dealt with with the utmost of caution.

MACNEIL: I see.

The mere fact that no bomb was found today, no serious bomb -- there were those two, one with a fake bomb -- that does not mean that it was not a serious threat, in your view, or it has to be taken as a serious threat.

SCHANAKER: No, it does not, because the security program that was put into place, of course, has been in planning since the communique was first received last Tuesday. And because the security program has been so intensive, integrating the federal police force up here, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, with the efforts of the Ontario provincial police force and, of course, probably most importantly, the Metropolitan Toronto police force, we don't know if the massive security program that has been implemented has indeed deterred the terrorists from carrying out what they had threatened to do.

MACNEIL: Let me just get a bit of background from you on these terrorists. How well organized are they?

SCHANAKER: They are a fairly well organized terrorist organization. They are not as well organized as, let's say, the Irish are or...

MACNEIL: Republican Army?

SCHANAKER: Yes, the IRA. Or they're less organized than the Basques in Spain, less organized than the Red Army Faction that operates out of West Germany, and now in France. They're less organized than some of the South American terrorist agencies -- organizations. But they are a very deadly group of terrorists.

MACNEIL: How many are there in Canada and the United States, and are they linked?

SCHANAKER: It's very difficult to say how many there are. We don't know for sure. We do know one thing. There are connections between Canada and the United States. We had an attempted murder of the Turkish charge' d'affaires in 1982 up here, a man by the name of Connie Gungor (?). The four people who were charged in that case are -- two of those people had indeed resided in Los Angeles, and there were numerous telephone conversations lawfully intercepted by both the American authorities and the Canadian authorities between those two people and the two accused here in Canada. Those four people were all charged. Three of them are now standing trial for the attempted murder of Connie Gungor.

MACNEIL: Do you know anything about where they get support?

SCHANAKER: It's very difficult to say. We know that they're trained in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, or South Yemen. We know they're also trained in Libya, under the guiding eye of Muammar Qaddafi. We know, most importantly, that they're trained by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and by the Japanese Red Army in those two centers. Those two organizations are known for the intensive training given to all terrorist organizations around the world.

As to their financial assistance, we can't say with any degree of certainty. I think it's anyone's guess. Many speculate that the Soviet Union is behind most terrorist organizations seeking to overthrow Western countries. And I can't say one way or the other whether I agree or disagree with that, because I have no evidence to indicate either.

MACNEIL: Well, what are the goals of their terrorism?

SCHANAKER: Well, the goals of the two Armenian organizations, the two which are the Armenian Revolutionary Army and then the Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia, are simply to have the Turkish government recognize that in 1915 there was an act of genocide; and secondly, to give either reparative and --reparative payments and/or the return of a certain portion of what was Armenia to the Armenians living today. That seems to be

the goal, and it seems to be as straightforward as that.

Of course, the Turkish in no way, shape or form are considering capitulation to any of those demands.

MACNEIL: Have Western governments, to your knowledge, quietly said to the Turks, "You could stop some of this violence if you would fully ventilate the events of 1915"?

SCHANAKER: It's difficult for me to answer that question. I don't know for a fact. And I can tell you that I don't know about our government up here.

I do know that at the United Nations, during the '50s, '60s, and particularly in the late '70s and early '80s, the Armenians lobbied quite strongly for support of the United Nations to put pressure on the Turkish government to rectify that harm which they felt had been done to them. The United Nations did not support the Armenian effort. And that's the only official advance that has been made by the Armenian people that I know of. And, of course, it has been rejected many times by the United Nations.

MACNEIL: To come back to the terrorism, why, if that is their goal, what would they have in common with the people in the Yemen and the Japanese Red Army and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine?

SCHANAKER: Well, Yemen, South Yemen and Libya are simply havens for terrorists. That's why they're trained there. The people of those two countries have nothing in common with the various terrorist organizations that are trained there, other than that they are havens for terrorists.

As far as the other two organizations that we're speaking of, the Japanese Red Army and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, it's quite simple. Those two terrorist organizations are the most highly specialized in terms of perpetrating acts of terror in the world. And they train other less skillfull terrorist organizations in assassinations, in bombings, and in transit attacks and in massive -- to our knowledge, these days, in massive nuclear attacks.

MACNEIL: Have Western police in Canada and elsewhere found any effective way of penetrating or dealing with these terrorists?

SCHANAKER: To a certain extent, the police have had some success with intelligence-gathering. The intelligence-gathering system is massive up here now with respect to the Armenian terrorist organizations, and it is becoming more and more effective. In the last five days it has been shown to be

effective, as there were many individuals who had been targeted as potential ASALA members; and because of that, they were able to be isolated and surveilled, and their movements were kept to a minimum. And consequently, possibly preventing them from perpetrating any acts of terror.

Secondly, the major step that's been taken is strict target-hardening with the potential targets, such as the embassy in Ottawa, which up until March the 12th, when it was attacked by the three terrorists, had just been protected by a single Pinkerton guard who had 34 hours of training in crowd control.

MACNEIL: I see.

Well, Mr. Schanaker, thank you very much.

JIM LEHRER: For more on the dispute between Armenians and Turks, Ross Vartian (?), Executive Director of the Armenian Assembly of America, and Ali Sevin (?), Vice President of the Assembly of Turkish-American Associations.

Mr. Vartian, do you support the terrorism?

ROSS VARTIAN: No, we do not. And the Armenian-American community, as well as our organization, condemns it. We don't believe it serves a constructive purpose, and it certainly will not solve the problem that exists between the Armenian people and the Turkish government.

The Armenian-American community has been for the past 70 years seeking peaceful political solutions to the issue. And I believe, as the expert indicated, the support does not come from the Armenian-American community, nor any other established Armenian community.

LEHRER: Do you support the goals of the terrorists, as outlined?

VARTIAN: The goals of the terrorists, in terms of recognition by the Turkish government that a prior government, the Ottoman government, committed a crime of genocide, most definitely. But the means, obviously, we do not support.

LEHRER: What about the second part of that, the restoration of land in Armenia, the old Armenia restored to present-day Armenians?

VARTIAN: The balance of the issue will have to be resolved through direct dialogue between the Armenian community and the Turkish government. But that dialogue cannot begin until such time as the genocide is recognized.

LEHRER: Is the genocide going to be ever recognized as genocide, Mr. Sevin?

ALI SEVIN: Of course, the Turkish government must speak for itself. Just speaking as a Turkish-American, I would say that it would be very, very difficult for the Turkish government to recognize something which is being debated by reputable historians as not being a genocide at all. In fact, the opening remarks used like 600,000 to 1 1/2 million Armenians were killed. The latest authoritative book on that is by Justin McCarthy. He's a demographer from Louisville, Kentucky, the University of St. Louis. His book, study of the Anatolian populations of that era, says there could not have been more than 600,000 Armenians, in a terrible time of conflict, where the Armenian uprising within the Ottoman Empire, according to Armenian historians, was able to raise 100,000 people under arms to fight alongside the Russians. And it was an insurrection within the ranks.

According to Justin McCarthy, there was a terrible time of massacres on both sides, where the Moslem population was decimated by 2 1/2 million, whereas no more than 600,000 Armenians could have possibly been -- could have possibly perished, according to Justin McCarthy.

LEHRER: So there was no geno...

SEVIN: He concludes that that doesn't look like genocide to him.

LEHRER: What do you conclude, as a Turkish-American?

SEVIN: That's definitely our conclusion. Because as we broaden our research, we find evidence that, just to the contrary, the Turkish government at the time tried to minimize harm to its Armenian population. There was, in fact, movement of Armenian populations from the affected areas to rear areas.

LEHRER: Well, look, let me ask you. Clearly, we're not going to be able to resolve that thing tonight. But let me ask you this question, both of you, beginning with you, Mr. Vartian.

How does this ever get resolved? If it can't be resolved on the MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour, when and where does it get resolved?

VARTIAN: It's going to be resolved when the Turkish government makes a new assessment on the basis of the entire Western World recognizing something which occurred, and joining with the Western World in that recognition.

This is not a creation of the Armenian community, the

Armenian genocide. The Armenian genocide was recognized as it was occurring in full public view by the United States, in a leading role, and by Turkey's friends and foes alike during World War I.

As to the allegation that it was done as a war measure, there were persecutions prior to that, which, of course, have been equally documented. There is just too much documentation to walk away from, throughout the Western World. And the expectation that the Armenian community is going to forget how it got dispersed around the world is just as unrealistic, perhaps. It just is not going to happen.

So, the Armenian community simply cannot back off the most serious event in its historical life. And the Turkish government is being expected to join the rest of the Western World in recognizing something which occurred in a prior regime, in a prior government, and get it over with.

LEHRER: And all you're asking is the Turkish government to say it was genocide and 600,000 Armenians died 70 years ago? Is that...

VARTIAN: At this stage, the Armenian-American community isn't even asking for that. What has brought this all to the front in the United States, at least, is Armenian genocide resolutions, recognition by the United States, reaffirmation of the prior recognition of the event. And as opposed to that, we have a Turkish government-inspired campaign of denial which is rally quite extraordinary. That is the issue for Armenian-Americans.

Armenian-Americans are justifiably proud of what the United States did to help try and prevent the genocide and to aid those who survived. And so from an American perspective, we're quite interested in that period of history. And then, of course, from an Armenian perspective, how can we learn to prevent genocide in the future if we don't study the prototypical example of this century? It's those two perspectives.

SEVIN: It's interesting that the Armenian community did not use the word genocide until about the '70s, where these terrorist acts began, 1973. And before that it was always massacres. And I guess the Turkish government is recognizing that there was a terrible time of massacres from both sides. It was not as if the Turkish government woke up one morning and said, "We're going to slaughter all the Armenians."

LEHRER: Is that your position, that that's what happened, that there was an overt decision made by the Turkish government to slaughter the Armenians?

VARTIAN: Yes, and there's documentation to that effect.

LEHRER: You say that didn't happen.

SEVIN: There is no documentation. There are three pieces of documentation which we are studying very, very carefully. And they are proving to be falsifications during a time of intense propaganda.

You have to put it in context. At the time of the First World War, the Turks, in the eyes of the European community, were looked upon as if they were some kind of strange animal that's coming. They was a threat to the Christian world, and all that. And the Turks were, the Ottoman Turks were at war with the Western powers. There was a lot of propaganda going back and forth to raise money in the Western World, so there was a lot of falsifications of facts.

LEHRER: From your perspective, then, from the Turkish-American perspective, what is the solution to this?

SEVIN: I think we view the Armenian position -- and I was glad to hear Mr. Vartian to say that the community does not support terrorism. While he says that, today in the Armenian newspaper Asperes (?) there was an announcement that there is a committee formed in Canada to raise funds to defend the terrorists. Now, if...

LEHRER: ...newspaper of your organization, Mr. Vartian?

VARTIAN: No, it is not.

LEHRER: It's not?

SEVIN: It's one of the Armenian newspapers. But if past is prologue, the same kind of thing happened in California, where an Armenian terrorist was being tried; and the Armenian community there, through the radio programs, through the newspapers, calling these terrorists freedom fighters, raised money, presumably based on tax-free donations from American citizens. And we sort of resent that.

LEHRER: Should he resent that?

VARTIAN: I don't think he should resent a legal defense fund. I think anyone is entitled to a legal defense. Obviously, the funds are being raised to provide legal counsel to an individual accused of a crime. If that person is prosecuted and a verdict is guilty, then that person should serve whatever time the crime requires.



LEHRER: So, gentlemen, to conclude, what the two of you are saying, you've laid out what you want the Turkish government to do.

You say the Turkish government will never do that because it's not justified.

So, the end result is going to be probably more terrorism. Right?

SEVIN: The terrorists should not have the media coverage that they do, because that's what they want. The more we give them coverage, the more we will have terrorism.

LEHRER: Are they helping or hurting your cause, Mr. Vartian?

VARTIAN: They're hurting it, in terms of a peaceful alternative, in terms of a dialogue with the Turkish government, in terms of the Turkish government coming to a realization that the Western World is not going to back off on a historical reality. It does cause difficulty.

LEHRER: Gentlemen, thank you both very much.